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Chairman: Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 93: Sustainable development and international economic cooperation (A/58/94-S/2003/642, A/58/131-S/2003/703)

(a) Women in development (A/58/135)

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Agenda item 97: Operational activities for development

(a) Operational activities for development (A/58/168)

Introduction and general discussion

1. **Mr. Francis** (Jamaica) noted the growing consensus that international migration had a significant potential for improving development in developing countries. Remittances from migrants had become a significant source of global finance, as they contributed significantly to development and poverty reduction in many developing countries. International migration issues should be placed at the forefront of the international agenda. Focus must be shifted from the negative effects of migration to ways of maximizing the potential development impact of international migratory flows on countries of origin and destination.

2. In view of the lack of significant political support for an international conference on migration, the possibility of utilizing alternative forums should be considered. His delegation would encourage further consideration of proposals for utilizing existing mechanisms, such as the Commission on Population and Development or a special session of the General Assembly. As a first step, the issue could be addressed at the regional level, as proposed in the report of the Secretary-General. His delegation believed, however, that the United Nations had an important role to play in promoting in-depth attention to the issue in a comprehensive manner.

3. There was an urgent need to re-examine the linkages between international migration and development in order to ensure that international migration contributed to long-term growth and development in the countries concerned. International labour migration could no longer be treated as an isolated issue but must be considered as a process to be managed. The objective should not be to prevent or obstruct mobility but to better manage it. The international community could effectively maximize the benefit from and address the many challenges of international labour migration by taking a number of steps, including the following: focusing on a comprehensive and cooperative approach to international migration management which would involve actions not only by governments but by a wide range of stakeholders; taking effective measures to prevent forced migration and the exploitation and abuse of migrant labour; developing a comprehensive international mechanism to deal with the linkages between migration and development; identifying policies through bilateral and multilateral forums aimed at developing a framework to address the loss of skills and human resources and the attendant developmental effect on countries of origin; and placing greater emphasis on programmes to address the push factors of migration, including development aid, targeting of international trade and investment and active attention to economic disparities resulting from the process of globalization.

4. **Mr. Kogda** (Burkina Faso) said that international migration was an extremely complex phenomenon which affected more and more countries. Many migrants came from the deprived sectors of the population and were subjected to cruel treatment. Women, in particular, were exploited in domestic work and prostitution. On the other hand, many intellectuals and qualified professionals migrated to countries where they would have better pay and working conditions. Many destination countries were experiencing shortages of qualified manpower, and some had to depend on migration to replace their ageing populations. In recent years, immigration had become a matter of serious concern in a growing number of countries. More recently, in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001, some countries had imposed restrictions on immigration.

5. The time had come to conduct an overall review of all migration issues, which affected countries of origin, transit countries and destination countries. Issues such as the ageing of the population, unemployment, the brain drain, remittances, traffic in

persons and social integration should be addressed at the global level through a multidimensional dialogue involving not only States but also regional and international organizations, development agencies and financial institutions, and civil society. The idea of convening a United Nations conference on migration should be seriously considered. Such a conference would provide an opportunity for opening up discussions, building trust and strengthening cooperation with a view to finding solutions to the problems created by international migration. His delegation invited all States Members to look beyond their own national interests and agree to the holding of such a conference.

6. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the United Nations was assuming leadership in efforts to create the necessary conditions for establishing partnership in the field of migration. Special mention should also be made of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for its work on behalf of migrants.

7. **Ms. Sham Poo** (United Nations Children's Fund) said that gender parity in education had been recognized as the most urgent Millennium Development Goal and the one with the shortest deadline, to be reached by 2005. Of the five organizational priorities set by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), girls' education was a fundamental, as it involved issues of access, equality and achievement. The experience and knowledge gained over the last several years clearly showed that one of the most violated rights for girls was the right to quality education. The direct causal link between girls' education and development was no longer in dispute, and investment in girls' education was recognized as bringing the highest return on social investment. Accelerating progress in girls' education could offer one of the best strategies for eradicating poverty, which was the first of the Millennium Development Goals. Girls denied the chance of education were more prone to disease, violence, abuse and trafficking. Schools were therefore a powerful protective force in children's lives. In conflict and post-conflict situations, education was even more important, as it was a channel for promoting peace and tolerance, without which reconstruction and reconciliation could not take place.

8. As the lead agency for the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative launched by the Secretary-General at the World Education Forum in Dakar, UNICEF had been working with other United Nations agencies to support governments in ensuring quality education for all girls everywhere. Current efforts focused on accelerating progress towards the 2005 Millennium Development Goal. While programmes for girls' education continued in all countries in which UNICEF operated, 25 countries had been selected for special attention with interventions aimed at reducing, and ideally eliminating, the gender gap by 2005. The "25 by 2005" initiative was designed to complement and enhance existing programmes. By way of example, in Afghanistan, the world had just celebrated the entrance of one million girls into the education system. In 2002, UNICEF's largest back-to-school campaign had seen a return to school of more than 3.1 million girls and boys. In Kenya, national primary school enrolment had increased by 1.3 million, and UNICEF was working with the Government to help the school system adjust to the challenges and to ensure that girls and boys alike were given quality education.

9. The experience of UNICEF had shown that there were specific measures which could help to promote girls' education. UNICEF invited all Governments to take the following elements into account when developing policies and implementing programmes for girls' education: locating schools closer to children's homes; providing integrated early childhood programmes; adopting an intersectoral approach; making education free; making schools safe; supplying clean water and latrines and separate toilet facilities for boys and girls; eradicating gender bias from textbooks and materials; training teachers in gender sensitivity; and gathering gender-specific education statistics. UNICEF urged governments, donors, international and non-governmental organizations, the private sector and all other stakeholders to commit resources and strengthen partnerships for educating girls.

10. **Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga** (Ecuador) pointed out that over the past 10 years migration had increased significantly and become a truly global phenomenon needing to be addressed responsibly by the organized international community. However, contrary to the situation in the early twentieth century, when there had been considerable openness to international movements of population, current migratory policies tended to be restrictive. As a result, international labour markets were divided and were unable to keep up with the growing integration of the goods and capital markets. Many socio-economic, demographic and political factors played a part in the current migratory trends. In

particular, people were driven to seek better living standards in countries that had higher levels of per capita income. When developing countries were unable to benefit from their comparative advantages owing to the protectionist measures and unfair trade practices applied by certain industrial economies, emigration became the only alternative for millions of people.

11. International migration contributed to the growth of the primary and secondary sectors of the economies of countries of destination and countries of origin, as migrants contributed to the labour force of receiving countries and sent remittances of money to their countries of origin. In several regions, total remittances were higher than official development assistance and sometimes were even comparable to foreign direct investment. In Ecuador, for example, in 2001, remittances had accounted for 9 per cent of GDP and 20 per cent of exports. Thus, migratory movements made a positive contribution to the creation of wealth and, consequently, of well-being. In addressing the phenomenon of international migration, it was important to strengthen mechanisms for dialogue and coordination at the institutional, subregional, regional and global levels. Above all, the parties involved must share responsibility for and participate in such efforts. At the same time, the rights of migrants and their family members must be protected.

12. **Mr. Simamora** (Indonesia) concurred with the Secretary-General concerning the need to develop human resources as a means of promoting economic growth and eradicating poverty, as well as participating more effectively in the world economic system and benefiting from globalization. Human resources development was central to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, targets and commitments adopted at the major United Nations conferences and summits. In the face of globalization, collective capacity-building and the empowerment of communities were as important as developing individual capacity. There was a need for greater support from the international community to complement the efforts of developing countries in implementing appropriate policies for human resources development. Such policies must respond to local need while taking account of global realities, such as international migration.

13. The migration issue was intimately linked to global development in all its aspects. His delegation shared the view of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) that migrants should be considered as potential agents of development and a means to strengthen cooperation between the home and the host society. That was particularly true in view of the fact that migrant remittances had grown, exceeding ODA made available to developing countries. Consequently, enhanced cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination was needed to deal with the challenges and benefits resulting from migration.

14. His delegation welcomed the adoption of the Plan of Action at the Fifth Asian and Pacific Population Conference, in which governments were urged, in cooperation with civil society organizations and the international community, to address the issue comprehensively. The forthcoming Second Coordination Meeting on International Migration organized by the Population Division would be a good mechanism for avoiding duplication of efforts among the various organizations involved with the issue. Serious consideration should be given to the possibility of holding an international conference under United Nations sponsorship to agree on standard practices and policies, particularly in handling the problems associated with international migration.

15. **Mr. Laurin** (Canada), referring to document A/58/135, drew attention to some of the positive aspects of globalization such as cost reduction accruing from trade liberalization, and the use of new information and communication technologies as a central tool for the empowerment of women.

16. Access to sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis provided planners and policy makers with greater understanding of the social and economic impact of their activities and Canada therefore welcomed the call for further studies of the effects of macroeconomic and trade policies. Canada was working to help ensure that the benefits of economic growth and increased wealth contributed to poverty reduction and sustainable development. The rules of the multilateral trading system must take into account the differential impact of trade on women and men. Failure to address the gender equality constraints in trade policy was costly and further complicated the challenge of poverty reduction.

17. Gender equality was an important development goal in its own right and was closely linked to poverty eradication and sustainable economic growth. Canada was proud to have contributed to a greater

understanding of those links through its support of a major publication on gender mainstreaming issued by the Commonwealth Secretariat earlier in 2003. His Government strongly believed that gender perspectives should be included in all facets of the World Summit on the Information Society, and encouraged Member States to ensure that the interconnection between gender equality and information and communication technologies was reflected in the outcomes of that meeting.

18. Welcoming the report on the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in document A/58/168, he mentioned Canada's recent participation in negotiations on strengthening the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

19. **Ms. Ramos-Shahani** (Philippines) said that document A/58/98 underscored the urgency of meeting the challenges posed by cross-border movements of people. The phenomenon could have a positive impact both on countries of origin and host countries, but a number of factors should be considered in the formulation of policies concerning international migration and the intricate linkages between migration and sustainable development.

20. Referring to the review of progress made on the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, she noted that the international community had fallen short of accomplishing the objectives of that Conference. In that regard, the participation of Member States in formulating policies on international migration was crucial. She also noted that, in its multi-year funding framework (MYFF), the United Nations Fund for Population Activities had allocated few resources for international migration, despite its mandate to implement the objectives of the Programme of Action.

21. The Government of the Philippines recognized and supported efforts made at the national and regional levels, including initiatives taken by the United Nations regional commissions and other bodies outside the United Nations system, to effectively address the challenges posed by international migration.

22. The role of remittances in development could not be overemphasized. Her Government had enacted legislation and established institutions to safeguard the rights and interests of migrant workers. It had also adopted a strategy to strengthen the channels of remittances to the Philippines, and to lower the cost of making such transfers.

23. **Mr. Paolillo** (Uruguay), said that the members of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and its associated States, on whose behalf he spoke, had been seriously affected by the deterioration in international financial conditions and terms of trade. A number of initiatives to boost capital markets, such as the innovative financial mechanisms destined to support democratic governance adopted by the Rio Group and the United Kingdom proposal for the creation of an international finance facility, had emerged. It was clear that donors had now recognized the need to increase ODA.

24. The fulfilment of the objectives of the Millennium Declaration and the Monterrey Consensus required clear coordination based on genuine solidarity and political will on the part of both developed and developing countries, in the true spirit of international economic cooperation. Aid should not be granted as a charity or privilege, but should take the form of dismantling barriers which denied the products of developing countries access to world markets, or helping those countries to bridge the technological gap, or achieve the full development of their human resources.

25. International cooperation for development had achieved rather meagre results. In view of the need for new modalities leading to tangible results within reasonable time frames, the role of the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and United Nations Development Fund coordination, both at headquarters and in the field, acquired even greater relevance. MERCOSUR fully supported all efforts to strengthen and streamline such coordination, rationalize the use of resources and avoid overlap, and welcomed the considerable increase in UNDP contributions. The situation with regard to core resources was still troubling, however, despite slight improvements.

26. Since the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action to promote and implement technical cooperation between developing countries, South-South cooperation had grown tremendously. At the United Nations conferences and summits the importance of such cooperation for capacity-building and the establishment of best practices in various areas had been highlighted. Successful examples of such cooperation could be replicated but continued support

in the areas of finance and technical cooperation from the developed countries, participation of the private sector and civil society, and systematic efforts on the part of the United Nations system were essential. Member States of MERCOSUR were committed to the success of the High-Level Conference of the Group of 77 on South-South cooperation scheduled for December 2003.

27. MERCOSUR was a fine example of the benefits of South-South cooperation that went beyond economic integration to include social, labour and cultural elements. Its member States wished to reiterate their appreciation for the support from the Perez Guerrero Trust Fund for small-scale projects devoted to research on economic integration. Since its creation, MERCOSUR had practised open regionalism aimed at increasing the capacity of its members for global integration. It was pleased that the concept of open regionalism was being further strengthened through MERCOSUR's cooperation initiatives with other countries in the region and on other continents.

28. **Mr. Lorenzo** (Mexico) said that the General Assembly had recognized that gender equality was fundamental to the attainment of economic growth and sustainable development and that investment in the development of women and children had a multiplier effect. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Mexico had stressed the link between gender equality and sustainable development and had supported the commitment to integrate the empowerment of women and gender equality in Programme 21, the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

29. The General Assembly had also recognized the importance of human resources development for economic growth and poverty eradication; it was indeed vital to the attainment of the internationally agreed development objectives. The Mexican Government had based its activities in that area on a new employment culture which placed the person at the centre of economic activity by conducting permanent training and employment programmes, combating discrimination and promoting personal rights and obligations. Emphasis was given to women, young people, vulnerable groups, older adults, disabled persons, persons suffering from HIV/AIDS, and indigenous communities.

30. Mexico endorsed the United Nations appeal for the building of more human economies; that would require concerted national and international efforts to improve people's technical skills and aptitudes. Technology and information systems must facilitate access to development for all people by reducing inequalities between and within countries. It was particularly important to promote human resources development strategies which would narrow the digital divide.

31. The question of international migration and development must be approached comprehensively and never in terms of a threat to security. International migration was a positive phenomenon but its linkages to development were complex, and the challenges and opportunities offered by the displacement of people across frontiers called for international cooperation and coordinated responses.

32. **Mr. Ayari** (Tunisia) said that human resources development formed the basis of any nation's prosperity, and all developing countries were now aware of the need for increased investment in human resources in order to secure endogenous and more sustainable development. Of course the international community had an important role to play in that area, and the developed countries should support the efforts of the developing countries to attain the Millennium Development Goals by increasing their ODA to the target of 0.7 per cent, finding a radical solution to the debt burden, opening up their markets and increasing direct foreign investment. Tunisia had fortunately invested at an early stage in the development of its human resources; education and training, for example, accounted for one third of the State budget. The country now had large numbers of highly trained personnel, some of whom went abroad to work in Africa and the Arab world.

33. Tunisia had been a pioneer in the Arab and Islamic world in seeking the total emancipation of women, beginning with the enactment in 1956 of the Personal Status Code, which had given effect to equality between women and men. In 1993, the Code had been amended in order to consolidate women's rights. Women were also encouraged to participate in public life, and they were now an activist presence on the political stage, as well as making their mark in the economic and business worlds. In university education, 55.1 per cent of students were women, as against 36.6 per cent in 1986.

34. The Second Committee should give due attention to the question of international migration and development, and Tunisia was in favour of convening a United Nations conference on the subject. The conference might focus on economic migration and its demographic and sociocultural aspects, as well as on the technical and political aspects of managing the phenomenon. In the meantime the General Assembly might hold a special session on international migration and development.

35. **Mr. Ramadan** (Lebanon) said that gender perspectives should be fully integrated into the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. In view of persistent income disparities, labour discrimination, the high incidence of poverty among women and the limited access of women to land and credit, Lebanon was carrying out several programmes to empower rural women, which provided knowledge and advice on health issues, family planning and early detection of osteoporosis and breast cancer, as well as sexual education. Primary education was free and compulsory for women and several training seminars were being conducted in subjects ranging from computer programming to various types of vocational training.

36. In his delegation's view, international migration brought growth both to the countries of origin and those of destination. Although the movement of skilled labour from the developing world represented a brain drain that benefited industrialized countries, migrant remittances provided valuable additional income to the families left behind and contributed to alleviating poverty. Lebanese migrants had contributed considerably to rebuilding the country after the war and continued to play a vibrant social and economic role in the new societies where they lived. Policies designed to integrate migrants into host country societies were vital to avoiding discrimination and xenophobia, which resulted in violations of the human rights of migrants. In that regard, he appealed to member States to fulfil their obligations under General Assembly resolution 57/219 on protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism.

37. **Mr. Savchuk** (Ukraine) said that his delegation believed that the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development in 2004 would reflect the large amount of work done in that area and the importance of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 57/270 B on implementation and follow-up of the major United Nations economic and social conferences. Progress had been made both at Headquarters and in the field in evaluation and monitoring and in streamlining of programming processes. The United Nations Development Group deserved praise for its efforts to align the common country assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework with the Millennium Development Goals.

38. However, a number of challenges persisted, the most daunting one being development financing. Ukraine welcomed the ODA increase in 2002 and the progress in the financial stabilization of United Nations operational agencies, but more energetic efforts were required to boost the funding of operational activities and render development resources predictable. Resource mobilization should be linked to performance on the basis of multi-year funding frameworks, which had produced a broader donor base and improved predictability. Partnership between the operational agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions, donor countries and other stakeholders was the key to operational activities for development. And opportunities for partnership relations with the private sector and civil society must be seized.

39. The system of operational activities had demonstrated its effectiveness. In particular, the United Nations office in Kyiv had strengthened the national capacity in a number of areas. However, Ukraine would welcome improved integration of its national priorities in the operational activities. With regard to mitigation of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, the implementation of the new United Nations Strategy for Recovery deserved special mention and increased support from the donor community.

40. **Mr. Yahya** (Israel) said that the presence of the subject of women's development on the agenda indicated universal recognition of its supreme importance. His delegation hoped that nations would combine their resources to advance the development of women and thus create a more equitable world, possibly the best investment for a secure and prosperous future.

41. As a result of their marginalization, women accounted for the vast majority of the estimated one billion people living in abject poverty. But the importance of the role of women in sustainable development had become a central tenet of development policy. In particular, the education of girls

and women had a direct effect on poverty reduction, economic growth, improved child survival rates, and family health in general. Israel had long been taking that approach: the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre had been addressing the connection between gender, poverty and development for over 40 years, and Israel's Centre for International Cooperation had a range of courses designed specifically for women.

42. Israel had always believed that gender equality and an egalitarian society should be cornerstones of every nation. Its Declaration of Independence had established the principle of equality for all citizens and it had ratified the international human rights covenants. Every local authority was now required to appoint an adviser on the status of women, and the creation of the Authority for the Advancement of Women and the Ministerial Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women demonstrated that Israelis no longer viewed the subject as merely a women's issue but rather as a challenge to society as a whole. However, women still encountered barriers to their advancement rooted in prejudice and inequality.

43. In the past five years Israel had made tremendous progress in tackling the problem of violence against women by enacting new legislation and establishing shelters for women throughout the country funded entirely by the Government. In all such activities, care must be taken to respect existing social relations between men and women and the delicate balance between preservation of traditional roles and the need to utilize women's potential.

44. **Mr. Martirosyan** (Armenia) said that the present wave of migration from poor countries could become a weighty factor in the fight against poverty. The developing countries accounted for almost all of the increases in the world's population, while the European countries, Russia and Japan were suffering a reduction of their labour forces. Migration of unskilled workers from South to North might thus prove mutually advantageous. For example, many developing countries received five to eight times more in cash transfers from their citizens overseas than from foreign aid, and migration stimulated international trade and investment.

45. But migration was subject to all kinds of constraints, and its critics stressed its destructive impact on society and culture and their fears that it would cause wages to fall and unemployment to grow in the industrialized countries. The anti-migration lobby ignored the fact that policies of interdiction rarely succeeded in limiting illegal migration. The hostility towards globalization was not unconnected with the failure to extend it to the international labour market. At the same time, the unlawful relocation of people had become a highly profitable business, and illegal immigrants were being subjected to cruel exploitation. But no country was ready to allow open migration, and in some countries the rules gave preference to highly qualified workers and encouraged a brain drain from the developing countries. A decision by industrialized countries to admit more migrant workers would help to offset their own labour shortages, improve living standards in developing countries, and stem the flow of illegal immigrants. There was no doubt that the problem existed, was getting worse, and must be solved. His delegation therefore supported the convening of a United Nations conference on international migration and development.

46. **Ms. Sherpa** (Nepal) said that human resources development was the best means of placing human beings at the centre of all development efforts. Strategies to improve human resources must focus on capacity-building and expanding opportunities for all, especially the vulnerable. That was why the international community must make concerted efforts to increase investment in education, health care and other social sectors so that everyone would have access to basic services. Nepal had taken far-reaching measures to promote human resources development in recent years, including efforts to provide technical education and improve overall educational standards. Primary health care, including immunization for children, was free and the Government had put in place secondary and tertiary health facilities and encouraged the private sector to invest in those services.

47. Women constituted half of the world's population and workforce and societies would always remain weak and unbalanced without the equal participation of women. The international community had introduced various measures over the years to address gender inequality, but the problem persisted. In Nepal, institutional mechanisms and strategies had been put in place to enforce recent measures to empower women. The Government had given high priority to women's development in its various development plans, focusing

on key issues such as education, poverty and political empowerment. Some improvements in the participation of girls and women in society had occurred but disparities in education had persisted.

48. In the area of health, despite some improvements in recent years, the situation with respect to women's health overall still left much to be desired. After touching on a number of problems that adversely affected Nepalese women, including high maternal and female child mortality rates, discriminatory child-rearing practices and the fact that women and girls were overburdened with work, she noted that, despite a variety of constraints, Nepal was committed to providing the basic health-care package to all, irrespective of their ability to pay. That new initiative emphasized advocacy and basic social services. Lastly, she appealed to the international community to help her Government in its fight against the Maoist insurgency and to increase investment in the economic and social sector.

49. **Mr. Kenyoru** (Kenya), noting the important links between development, poverty eradication and gender equality, declared that gender mainstreaming was an essential strategic component of poverty eradication. His Government had taken significant steps to ensure the representation of women in its economic development efforts. Human resources development and access to information and communications technologies were key to sustainable development. As noted in the Secretary-General's report, five of the eight Millennium Development Goals were directly related to health and education, two sectors which were vital to a productive labour force. However, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other infectious diseases, together with the level of resources allocated to education, continued to undermine the productivity of Kenya's labour force.

50. With respect to international migration, he said that the international community should ensure that it was well managed and coordinated so as to balance the needs and concerns of labour-poor and labour-rich countries. In that regard, he welcomed the establishment of a commission on migration, adding that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) should play a central role in that Commission.

51. **Ms. Mammadova** (Azerbaijan), noting that human capital was a crucial factor for promoting sustainable economic growth and poverty eradication, said that human resources must be developed through adequate institutional frameworks. Accordingly, her Government accorded high priority to primary education and training in e-education and information and communication technologies. A better trained labour force would be more competitive on the world market and permit each qualified individual to contribute more to economic growth, leading to the elimination of social inequality across regions and societies. Access to safe drinking water, sanitation, nutrition and adequate health-care services were indispensable for any sound policy on human resources development.

52. Turning to operational activities for development in the context of UNIFEM activities, she welcomed the unique role UNIFEM played in strengthening women's economic security and the empowerment of women. The involvement of women in the economy helped solve major social problems and improved gender balance through the equal participation of men and women in the labour market. Accordingly, the Government and society as a whole needed to pay special attention to women's employment.

53. Noting that the transitional period had led to lower incomes, higher unemployment rates and a weaker social sector, she said that, owing to the economic slowdown in the period 1991-1995, her Government had been unable in the short term to channel the necessary resources towards improving the social status of women refugees and internally displaced persons following Armenia's aggression against her country. The employment rate among women in industrial regions was noticeably higher than in rural areas. The reasons for that included the larger number of children in rural families, an insufficient number of nurseries and kindergartens, and social stereotypes that prioritized men's labour over that of women. Subsequently, the Government had adopted in 2002 a State programme of poverty reduction and economic development, setting out its economic priorities. Reflecting gender concerns in the activities of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) would complement and reinforce the efforts of UNIFEM.

54. **Mr. Husain** (Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)) said that his organization generally endorsed the Secretary-General's report, including the statement that achieving sustainable

development depended on recognizing women and men as key actors and agents of change. A resolution adopted at the May 2003 Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers had urged member States to adopt a participatory approach that took into account women's needs and strategic interests, thus enabling them to participate in all economic and social development projects and programmes in their respective countries.

55. Referring to the view often expressed in the media that women had an inferior status in Islamic society, he said that Islam had granted equality to women in all aspects of social and communal life and granted them rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of legitimate happiness, including the right to own property, the right to education, the right to health benefits and to a dignified way of earning a livelihood. The fact that women in several OIC countries had fallen behind in those areas was a reflection of societal constraints, communal traditions and colonial neglect, despite what Islam, as a religion, had ordained. Those anomalies had been recognized and remedial measures were being introduced. Progress in that regard would depend on the resources and ability of the Governments and societies concerned to abandon age-old traditions. To that end, OIC welcomed any technical and financial support that the United Nations and its well-meaning partners in development were willing to provide.

The meeting rose at 5.22 p.m.